DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 194 UD 026 914

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TITLE Project SCOPE--A Working Partnership.
INSTITUTION Public Education Association, New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY City Univ. of New York Research Foundation, N.Y.
PUB DATE Jan 89
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Role; *College School Cooperation; Elementary Education; *Elementary Schools; Higher Education; Interviews; *Parent Participation; *Program Administration; Program Evaluation; Urban Areas; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS City University of New York Brooklyn College; Collaboratives; *New York; *Project SCOPE

ABSTRACT

After two semesters of implementation, Project SCOPE (School and College Organized to Promote Excellence) has created a viable structure of collaboration between Public School 152 and Brooklyn College (New York) and has undertaken a range of activities which have already had positive influence on the morale and performance of parents, students, and teachers. The goal of Project SCOPE is to form a working partnership between the college and the principal, administrators, teachers, school board members, and parents of the school to provide an environment in which the students can learn. Evaluation information was gathered through observations and non-structured interviews with the initiator of the project, key school personnel, and parents. The following components are discussed: (1) the council that directs operations; (2) the school-college relationship; and (3) parent involvement. The following recommendations for improvement are suggested: (1) continue and expand support; (2) offer opportunities for other schools to use the project as a model; (3) increase structured interaction among parents, staff, and college; (4) continue to provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their professional careers; and (5) make the highly successful summer workshop for staff, parents, and college an annual event. (FMW)

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Project SCOPE - A Working Partnership

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Evaluation prepared under a grant from the Research Foundation of City University of New York.

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January 1989

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Project SCOPE - A Working Partnership

Introduction

Public School 152, located in the Midwood section of Brooklyn on Glenwood Road at East 23rd Street adjacent to Brooklyn College, once a highly regarded school in an affluent neighborhood, has experienced the changes so well documented in the New York City school system. In recent years, demographic changes in the area resulted in a widely diverse student body, most of whom come from families who are newcomers to the country, unacquainted with and subject to the stresses and malaise of poverty. The school was not successful in meeting this challenge. Only a few years ago, Schools Chancellor Nathan Quinones threatened to take over the school in light of its students' poor performance on mandated reading and math teste.

In addition to the depressed socio-economic conditions which confront many of the children in PS 152, they are also forced to cope with a school building which is sorely in need of paint, repair and physical improvement. At the very least, a building which houses more than fifteen hundred people, most of them children, should have more than three bathrooms in all. Despite constant complaints registered by the administration, very little has been done to ameliorate the problem, other than repeated confirmatory inspections. Indeed it is impressive that the staff has managed to make the hallways attractive against such odds.

Despite its proximity to Brooklyn College, P. S.152 was hardly regarded as an ideal placement for student teachers. It seemed logical to some faculty members of the School of Education that the college should help improve the school, or, failing that, should withdraw its students.

The relationship between the college and the school was strained quite apart from the problem with the student teachers. The college had a reputation for insensitivity amongst the P.S. 152 community, because it had evicted the sixth grade overflow from Quonset huts on the college campus, forcing the opening of an annex at some distance from the school for the fifth grade and the sending of the sixth grade to Hudde Junior High. In that atmosphere, the principal of PS 152 rejected the idea that Brooklyn College participate in any way toward resolving the educational crisis. However, with his retirement and the passage of time, the possibilities seemed ripe for a redefinition of the relationship between the college and the school. Professor Vera Tarr of the School of Education undertook the initiation of a new working partnership between Brooklyn College and the constituent components of P.S. 152, i.e., the principal, administrators, teachers, school board, members and parents, whose aim was to provide an environment in which the children could learn.

Fortunately, District 22 has been very supportive of the project, perceiving that the school would be a good laboratory for the college and that the new ideas generated and tested at

P.S. 152 could well be useful to schools throughout the district. Thus, Project SCOPE (School and College Organized to Promote Excellence) was started. The purpose of this report is to present a preliminary evaluation of the project.

Research Methodology

Information for this evaluation was gathered over a period of time through observations and interviews with Professor Tarr, key personnel in the school and parents. Essentially, the questions were non-structured, although they were directed specifically toward the Project. The opportunity was afforded the interviewee to air his or her views about the school, and about relationships in the outside community, primarily with Brooklyn College, but including other community groups. Professor Tarr also made available her records of the project which contained all the concrete evidence, i.e., records, photographs and meeting notes, of the activities of Project SCOPE.

The Council

The start of the project was a workshop held at P. S. 152 in the summer of 1985 jointly sponsored by the College and the Public Education Association (see PEA REPORTS, attached). The purpose of the workshop was to bridge the gap between parents and teachers and to agree on shared goals for improving the school. The immediate success of the workshops as an

introduction to the possibilities of change within the school was evident: all participants were extremely enthusiastic. Professor Tarr and PEA initiated discussions among the participants and representatives of the community school district looking toward a more lasting collaboration. In 1987 the district pledged funding.

In order to continue the working relationship among parents, teachers and college that had begun during the summer, a council was formed to be the operational arm of the project.

The council is composed of teachers representing the various parts of the school, i.e., grade levels, English as a Second Language (ESL), annex, parents, the Principal and Professor Tarr. Membership on the council is voluntary and, initially, teachers were quite excited about participating. Technically, members of the council may rotate. In actuality, however, there has been very little change of participants. If one member cannot attend any one particular meeting, someone else may fill in and assume the responsibility of disseminating important information. As meetings of the council take place after school hours, members are reimbursed for their time from Project funds.

The council's responsibilities are varied. New ideas about curriculum development are presented and discussed. Initiation of ideas may come from any member of the group. Specific problems are placed before the council, and cooperative attempts

are made to find practical and creative solutions. For example, the logistics of an upcoming science fair were discussed. Members also use the council as a forum for the airing of grievances about the Project or the school.

The session of the council which was observed epitomized the operation of the group. In this instance, a professor of developmental psychology from the college presented a research proposal, requesting permission to use several classes as subjects to study indirect learning. After the presentation of the proposal, the teachers asked questions regarding the aim of the research, how it would help them, how the students would benefit and how much time would it take. The principal called attention to the necessary levels of bureaucratic approval for the project to be undertaken. Ultimately, the council deferred consideration. It would seem that an important aspect of the teachers' attitudes toward the Project were revealed by the nature of their questions. Although expressed attitudes toward the Project have essentially been positive, there appears to remain a latent strain between the teachers and the college. The teachers wanted to be very clear about their role in the research, and to be assured that the outcome would enhance their teaching in some fashion. The implication was that the school is their institution and that research conducted with the school population should be of direct benefit to them.

Subsequent to the council meeting, the issue of the

psychological research was discussed among the teachers, who apparently expressed a great deal of ambivalence toward the undertaking. Again, the basis for the response appears to lie in the teachers' conflicted view of their professional role and in their effective lack of power. Some teachers felt that their decision making powers were being by-passed in their not being approached in advance for permission for the presentation itself. It should be noted, however, that our informant said that, by and large, they are consulted and this is extremely important to their sense of professionalism.

In addition to the presentation of the research proposal, matters reported on and discussed included the coordination of Bronx Zoo activities with a new social studies curriculum built around the zoo, organization of the forthcoming science fair, supervision for after-school tutoring, the success of adult education programs and a proposal from the Ditmas coalition to sponsor a "latch-key" program at the school. The teachers remarked on the advantages of networking through Professor Tarr and expressed satisfaction with freedom to choose their areas in the new curriculum. That the curriculum had been developed by a subcommittee of the council was an additional source of professional satisfaction.

School College Relationship

Since the start of Project SCOPE, several new connections

between the two institutions have been undertaken. For example, Professor Tarr recruited education students to work as tutors after school last semester. Paid $5.00 per hour, the education students helped P.S. 152 students for 1 1/2 hours four days a week. This year the program was delayed because of supervisory problems but everyone was eager to resume. In addition, approximately ninety education students work in the classrooms every day for 2 1/2 -3 hours. (Each student spends one session a week.) They are participant observers, helping in small group instruction as needed. Classes are covered every day although not by the same individual.

Brooklyn College also conducts on-site teacher training courses at PS 152. Education students tutor children identified as needing special help on a one-to-one basis and then meet in seminars to discuss their progress with a Brooklyn College professor. Additionally, a schedule of lunch time workshops is being planned where Brooklyn College Education faculty will discuss topics of interest to teachers. For example a professor from the Brooklyn College English department will discuss how literature can be integrated into the social studies curriculum and vice versa.

The students of PS 152 have also played their part. At a recent educational convocation for the new Dean of Education at Brooklyn College, students sang and recited.

To a substantial extent, these new undertakings have helped smooth relationships between the two institutions. Importantly, they have also helped improve student achievement; reading scores increased after Project SCOPE's first year.

Although most of the teachers view Project SCOPE favorably and do see it as professionally rewarding, discussions with Professor Tarr, Principal Lester Kostick and teachers confirmed the continued existence of strain between the school and Brooklyn College, deriving essentially from the prior relationship. To some extent, the project has successfully dealt with the residual resentment, however, when the teachers perceive an encroachment upon their power, the negative attitudes resurface. A prime example of this is the introduction of tutors from Brooklyn College. Initially, the professors supervising the tutors envisioned a reciprocal project; they wanted the teachers to file written reports on the classroom progress of each child in the program, and they in turn would report to the teacher on the child's progress in the tutorial. The teachers rejected the task of preparing the extra paper work required, and, eventually, Professor Tarr revised the program so that only the college prepared progress reports. For its part, The College, represented by President Hess and Deans Impellizeri and Grumet (former and current Deans of Education) are enthusiastic about the project and they are extremely supportive, despite the fact that some members of the School of Education remain cynical about the probability of sustained

progress at P.S. 152.

It would seem that beyond the strain between the two institutions which derives from the historic relationships, there is a discomfort that the teachers have with the college which seems to be inherent in their profession as well as a function of their structural position in the relationship. Essentially, they feel that their professional role is constantly threatened and they they have very little power. The existence of this role strain is evident from the entire tenor of their discussions. On the one hand, they see themselves as professionals with all that designation implies. On the other hand, they operate within a setting in which most of the professional activities are mandated from above. For example, one teacher pointed out that in the morning she is required to give basic reading lessons, then a math lesson, followed by phonics. She does not even have the option of deciding when these lessons would logically fit in with other lessons. She also expressed a sense of isolation from a professional community. Teachers at PS 152, which is extremely overcrowded, have three lunch periods, they do not even have the opportunity to share their ideas informally over lunch, although many teachers give up their lunch hours to work on the Project. One of the positive aspects of Project Scope pointed to by an interviewee was that the council presented the possibility of discussing projected curriculum and gave the teachers a role in the decision making process. In addition the Project helps to

overcome professional isolation and opens up possibilities for the teacher to be professional even within this type of setting. It should be noted that the interviewee emphasized the Project's potential for opening the possibilities; she did not feel they were yet fully realized because of the structural constraints.

Lester Kostik, principal of PS 152, recognized that one of the main effects of Project SCOPE is to bring into juxtaposition all of the professional groups in the school and to enable the development of a comprehensive innovative approach to the enhancement of the educational milieu. He concurred that the project reinforces the teachers' professional self-image, primarily through participation on the council. This is the forum in which the teachers can express their views on curriculum development, assess the needs of the school and veto measures of which they do not approve. The existence of the council also allows for a more democratic leadership style on Kostik's part, as he has the opportunity to exchange ideas with the teachers, Professor Tarr and parents.

Parent Involvement

Beyond its activities during the working school day, Project SCOPE has worked hard to involve the parents in the life of the school. Essentially, the project has employed a two-pronged

approach to the parents. The first, and most successful, has been through an adult education program for parents and other members of the community. Three night classes at the school are given this semester by members of the school faculty: a High School equivalency diploma preparation class (GED), another in English as a second language (ESL) and the third in computer operation. Edward Cypress, an assistant principal who teaches the GED class, was quite proud of his success. Ten of his students qualified for high school equivalency diplomas last spring, an impressive number. For some parents the classes afford an opportunity to be involved along with their children in the educational process. Mr. Cypress reports that children often bring in their parents' homework when the parent has to miss a class. Very often, parents bring their children to the night classes, thus confirming for the child the value placed on education by the parent.

The English as a second language classes have been equally successful. Parents, who speak a broad variety of languages, (Spanish, Vietnamese, Creole, etc) have come together and operate as a cohesive unit under the enthusiastic direction of Lorraine Donlon. Donlon is the Secretary of the Project SCOPE Council and teaches ESL to PS 152 students during the day. It is significant that just as in the GED Program, parents and students have the opportunity to share an educational experience. The computer program follows much the same model as the ESL and GED programs. Parents use the same equipment as the

children who learn word processing skills, also taught my a PS 152 faculty member.

The other way in which Project SCOPE is involved with the parents is perhaps more problematical; it is through its relationship with the Parents Association. It would seem that a task which faces Project SCOPE is mediation of the relationship between the association and the school staff. To a large extent, the teachers feel that there is inadequate parent involvement, and that educational excellence requires parental concern. The head of the Parents Association in turn, reported that many parents feel that communication with teachers is difficult, at best. She felt that Project SCOPE had helped to some extent to break down the barriers, but that many parents are still reluctant to express their opinions and are somewhat intimidated by the institution. One positive step that Project SCOPE has taken, and which was very successful, was a morning tea for the second grade where parents and teachers were able to interact informally and discuss mutual problems.

Conclusions and Recommendations

After only two semesters of implementation, Project Scope has created a viable structure of collaboration with Brooklyn College and undertaken a range of activities which have already had positive influence on the morale and performance of parents, students and teachers. Plans for the coming year propose to

enhance this program. Moreover, at this point, Project SCOPE is entering another phase of its existence. In the not too distant future, the project plans for an evolving educational park, which would include PS 152, Hudde Junior High School and Brooklyn College Academy, an alternative high school.

With this new dynamic, great possibilities exist for benefits for all of the schools involved. To facilitate this transition and build on the strong foundation for school improvement laid so far, we recommend:

I. Project SCOPE should have continued strong support. Its planned expansion into an educational park should be encouraged along with efforts to bring community resources into the school.

II. The district should offer opportunities for Project Scope to share its approach and innovations with interested district schools, and other schools in the district should be encouraged to develop collaborative relationships with appropriate institutions.

III. Project SCOPE should continue efforts to bring parents and teachers closer together by expanding its successful initiatives and adding others. Specifically, the Project should increase opportunity for structured interaction among parents, staff, and college by:

Strongly encouraging parent participation on the Council,

Inviting parents to participate on ad hoc subcommittees such as the one that developed the curriculum,

Inviting parents to teacher-led workshops on new curriculum or other matters of mutual interest,

Holding frequent, regularly scheduled, informal social occasions for parents and teachers,

Expanding highly successful evening classes where parents learn from their children's teachers,

Finding ways to bring needed social services for parents into the school.

IV. Project SCOPE should continue to provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their professionalism by:

Increasing opportunities for participation in curriculum development and policy deliberations,

Continuing and expanding the Brooklyn College on-site workshops,

Offering teachers the opportunity to share their expertise in curriculum, child development, discipline,

problem-solving with College faculty in seminars and as guests lecturers in undergraduate education classes.

V. Project SCOPE should maintain and enhance its participants' commitment by making the highly successful summer workshop for staff, parents and college an annual event.

V. Project SCOPE should maintain and enhance support and commitment by all participators by making the highly successful Summer workshop for staff, parents andd college an annual event.